

REFLECTIONS

by

GEORGE FREEMAN

SOME MEMORIES
OF MY LIFE AND TIMES
FROM MY BOYHOOD DAYS
UNTIL THE PRESENT (1982)

*The story of some of the goings on and recalling
the names and nicknames of some of the characters
of this, our village, of Sidley.*



Bexhill Museum
No. L 1562 b

REFLECTIONS

by

G. W. (Daggy) FREEMAN

— · · · · —
A few reminiscences of
one of the last
of Sidley's living Victorians

*Remember me, remember me
And bear me in your mind,
Let all the world say what they will
But speak of me as you find.*

Foreword

THIS little booklet is a short account of some small episodes in my father's life. It is not a literary masterpiece—it is not intended to be—but is printed more or less as he penned it in an exercise book from time to time, as certain events in his life (and also those of some of his contemporaries) stirred in his memory. This explains why sometimes he repeats himself and why the chronology may sometimes be slightly out of order.

It is probably not of much interest to those outside our family, but to those others who may read it, it will give an insight into the way many people lived in the Sidley of years ago when he was a lad (hard times for many of his generation).

Having regard to the above facts, I trust that any who read it will enjoy it, and possibly find amusement, as well as enlightenment in these few pages.

June, 1982

K.G.F.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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June, 1982

K.G.F.

**This is my life-story, as I remember it from my
boyhood days; and the happenings in the old
days in this village called Sidley**
by
GEORGE FREEMAN
(more well known as "Daggy" Freeman)

I WAS BORN at the back of the old Sussex Inn which was situated on the site of the present Sussex Hotel. The inn was then owned by my Aunt Topsy. There were two old cottages which stood on the bank, in one of which I came to life in the year 1892, and the day was the 14th July—which no doubt was a great day for my mother, but little did we know what a hard struggle lay ahead of us as a family to live.

Well, as time went on, and I started to grow up, I began to take notice of things that were going on in this village of ours called Sidley, and I will name them as I go along.

I started school at the age of three years at Sidley Infants, and the Mistress was a Mrs. Burdett; she taught me to count on a frame of beads and to knit with a pair of knitting needles and a bag tied round my waist with coloured wool in it. I stayed at this school until I was nearly seven years old.

In between the years at this school a lot of things happened to me: Firstly, we moved from the old cottage where I was born to a house in Sidley Street. I remember one Sunday my sister Mabel and I were sent to Sunday School, which was held in one of the little shops and was called the Sidley Hall. After the service I was told to light a fire

in the sitting-room, which I did, but unfortunately I did not open the air vent to the chimney, thus filling the house full of smoke. I paid for this by getting a good hiding and being sent to bed without having any tea.

It was soon after this that a sad thing happened to us, as I lost my father who died running to a fire—he belonged to the Bexhill Fire Brigade—and was found by the roadside, having broken a blood-vessel, so I was told. Also he was a soldier in the old Sussex Volunteers. We had a big military funeral, the coffin being carried on a gun-carriage.

After this life became hard, and we had a job to live. I remember having to go to shop and get two-pennyworth of black treacle in a basin; also going to the soup kitchen for two-pennyworth of soup, which was a few split peas boiled in water with a few bones, which no doubt we had to be thankful for.

It was about this time that I heard that I could get two-pennyworth of skim milk from Mr. Tom Bodle's farm around Glover's Lane; also we could get some stale bread for sixpence at Arscott's the bakers at Bexhill, so early in the morning away I had to go with a pillow-case on my arm to get this Godsend.

Well, money being short, my mother had to go out to work to keep us. This she had to do by scrubbing at the wash tub from 8 o'clock in the morning until 8 o'clock at night. This she did at a laundry owned by Mr. and Mrs. Webb of North Road. This went on from Monday afternoon until Thursday, and then for a change she went ironing until Friday night, and sometimes Saturday morning. These were the good old days, they say!

I went to school at St. Peter's, Chantry Lane. The headmaster was Mr. Bunting, to whom I am very grateful

for a good education, which always stood me in good stead for the years that lay ahead of me.

It was about this time when things began to move in the village of Sidley. The Bexhill to Crowhurst railway line was being built. I remember the navvies—big men they were. If it was raining they would go into the New Inn at six o'clock in the morning and stay there until "chuck-out time" which was eleven o'clock at night in those days, and the price of beer was tuppence a pint. Then the free for all used to start: fighting went on—women and all would have a go, tearing at one another's hair like nothing on earth.

As a boy I used to get a few coppers from the tally-hoos, or the four-in-hands as we called them. We used to hear a note on the post-horn and we would, as boys and girls, make a rush to Sidley Green where the coach would stop. Here we would turn head-over-heels for pennies thrown by the people on the coach. This meant some sweets, of which we could get a lot for a penny. It was about this time that I saw my first penny farthing bike being ridden on the main road, but I cannot remember who it was riding it. I heard say it was a man called Mark Vidler who was the local chimney sweep

Harking back to fights in the village I might add that many was the time that I stood beside the road in front of the Sussex Hotel and watched the fights going on between the notorious Salisbury Road Gang led by a man named Georgie Evernden and the Sidley Gang led by a boy called Charlie Eldridge. At one of these fights I and some more boys tossed some lighted fireworks in amongst them, but they still went on fighting.

As I have said, it was a job to live. Well do I remember going to school with girl's shoes on and an Eton College long-tailed coat which, you may be sure, made all the other

boys laugh at me, but they were given to me, so I had to wear them.

At the back of the New Inn there was the old Sidley pond, where I used to spend a lot of my young life—fishing in the summer, and sliding on the ice in the winter, girls and boys all together, and when too many got on the ice, it would break and in we would go, and that would be our lot. Yes, the pond could tell some tales if only it could talk, like the time when the men threw the policeman in the water and then played football with his helmet; but you can guess that they had to pay dear for that little job—some of them I think got six months for it.

Another time I remember Squire Brooks's stacks getting alight. The fire engine came, which in those days they called a Manual—firemen had to pump the water by hand with so many on either side of it.

The policeman in those days at Sidley was P.C. Marchant, who us boys called "Slim Jim"; my word, he used to chivvy us about. He caught me and some more boys playing football with a tennis ball on the main road; he took us to Cantelupe Road Court and the Magistrate, a Mr. Dewing, fined us half-a-crown. I paid mine in half-pennies, which I had saved up and was a lot of money in those days, and another boy paid his in pennies. I remember one time when Slim Jim was chasing us we got under and in the faggots in Tib Adams's brickyard. He called out to us: "Come on out of there". Being good boys and little angels, we called back: "You come and b——well fetch us out". Another time we called out to him to chase us, which he did. We ran through the old orchard, with him after us; being dark we had cut our mother's clothes line down and strung it across the path. Of course, over he went. That stopped him coming after us at this place at night. The orchard used to run between the main road and Claremont and Cumberland roads.

I can recall the days when the men used to play a game called quoits on Sidley Green. The quoits were made of iron and were very heavy to throw, but they seemed to do it alright and there was lots of beer flying around (still two pennies a pint). As boys we used to play Nip Cat, barber lee—this was a version of the old game of hide and seek, also rounders, football and cricket; we had peg tops and tops we called window breakers, which jumped. I played marbles in the concrete triangle at the bottom of Sidley Street where the sweet shop now stands—we had to make our own fun in those days, and what happy days they were. We used to get chased by an old boy called Henry Gwinn, who we used to call the dirty old man. He used to get blind drunk, then he would knock his Missus about; they lived in Cumberland Road; also living with them was a lady we called Dewdrop; and Darkie, the old cattle drover.

What queer names some of the people had in Sidley; some I will mention: Mark Vidler, Ebenezer Wilson, Snorker Thomas, Tommy Clout, Bourner the scissor grinder, Tibby Sinden, Johnny Oliver, Beeser Ransome, Joshua Turner, Samuel Goodsell, John Sinden living with his wife and seven children in the tiny black cottage on the site where the entrance to the car park now stands. The door of the cottage was always open; I remember once when all the seven children were having tea all seated round the table when a person passing happened to look in the door, the old lady said: "Come in for a cup of tea and a bun for sixpence with nothing, to see us feed"—what a sense of humour they had in those days.

What curious nick-names the boys and men had in this village of ours. I will name some of them beginning with my namesakes: Peathrow Freeman, Snowball Freeman, Thumpum Kennard, Winkles Willard, Cocoa Willard, Cunny Morton, Nibbs Coleman, Porky Moore, Stinker Allen,

Peewit Wilson, Nigger Wilson, Nanny Bristow, Cherry Cook, Strangle Cook, Skinny Cook, Rooster Ransome, Fatty Ransome, Ginger Ransome, Jerkum Morris, Martha Morris, Damson Adams, Buck Adams, Choggy Geal, Spud Taylor, China Taylor, Skip Beecham, Bogey Isted, Jesus Isted, Tremble Easton, Spider Easton, Bosher Beal, Snorker Thomas, Nanny Sharp, Bully Leonard, Sharper Pain, Dudda Rich, Jammy Turner, Blue Ransome, Puggy Vitler, Good-boy Vitler, Chinny Dallaway, Newt Simmons, Botney Freeman and lastly, myself, Daggy Freeman. I am sure there were some more, but I cannot recall them at the moment; all these were living in this little community of ours.

Now I will give you the names of the people who owned the shops around here, beginning with the ones in Sidley Street which were old lady Sturtion's, the paper shop; Coleman's the grocers, More's the butcher (later Thatchers'), Woodcock the greengrocer (later a little Chapel), then a shop full of washing dollies; next one was empty; then came a concrete triangle where we played marbles. All these were on the right-hand side looking from the main road. Opposite was Ebenezer Wilson's, another grocers. Now, starting on the main road, both sides: Pankhurst's Mill, the bakers; Mr. Parkes the farmer, who owned most of the land round here; now the stables for his horse and carts; next Mr. Chittenden the trug maker—also he made hoops for the girls and cricket bats for the boys; now came Beals the wheelwrights; Joshua Turner, the blacksmith—where Marleys now stands. Opposite was the brickyard owned by the Adams family, where the men used to work from four o'clock in the morning until eight or nine o'clock at night on piecework, making bricks. Afterwards they would go down to the pub for a pint of ale with a clay pipe thrown in. The old boys used to break the ends of the pipes to make them come under their noses—these they called snitch warmers.

Continuing with the shops, etc., next was the old tin hut—the working men's club; next an empty shop—now the sweet shop, which was owned by two old boys we called Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee; we used to annoy them by wetting our fingers and pushing them up and down the windows. Needless to say, away we had to run. Opposite there was a Mr. Bonner the scissor grinder; now Tibby Sinden the farmer; Noakes the butchers; not forgetting Nanny Sharp the baker. I remember he made a wedding cake for one of my mates—Harry Bristow was his name, and because he did not invite us to the wedding some of the boys went into the bakehouse and cut off a piece of cake, which we enjoyed very much, but what a stink there was about it.

Next came the Sussex Inn, which was kept by my Aunt Topsy and Uncle Jim Jefferys. At the back of the inn was a little wooden hut which was used by a shoemaker. We called him Dummy, because he was deaf and dumb. As boys we used to go up to the open door and rattle it, then out would come the hammer he was using, but very nearly always he would miss us. Next on the list was a Mr. Wickens' grocers and the local Post Office. The postman's name was Ernie. I have heard say that he had telegrams to deliver as well, some as far away as Crowhurst, so I was told.

Now on this side of the road was Burnt House Farm, owned by Mr. Johnny Oliver. The entrance to the farm was where Buxton Drive is now. This was shut off by some big blue gates—we dared not go inside them. There was an orchard at the back of the house and one night myself and Harry Bristow went scrumping in there. I got up a big pear tree, Brissy was underneath. I shook the tree and he was very nearly knocked out and had a very sore head caused by the pears that fell.

Now for Sidley Green and the New Inn, where lots of things happened in those days long since gone by. Next we come to Snorker Thomas's house—I think he was the local Registrar of Births and Deaths. Now Beal's forge where many is the time I went in and had a warm up in the winter while watching them shoe the horses; sometimes they had to strap them down to stop them kicking. Mr. Beal had a cycle shop next door: he hired cycles out for 6d. an hour. I used to hire one for the hour and keep it for, say, two or three hours, then creep back and put it outside the shop. The next shop was Perry's the sweet shop where the barbers and ladies' salon now stands, and the last shop was George and John Watsons' the bakers—the bakehouse is still there behind the shop.

Well, I wanted more excitement, so I took up poaching. I caught my first rabbit when I was seven years of age: I shot it with a catapult. The bullets I used were made of lead which I made in a mould after melting it on the fire in our kitchen. Well, having started with a catapult, I now wanted a ferret and some nets, which I bought from shops, but later on I made them all myself, so equipped with these I used to roam around Buckholt woods and pit my wits against the keeper, whose name was George Reed on the estate of Lord Brassey, who lived in a big mansion called Normanhurst at Catsfield. I went beating for this noble gentleman when he held his annual pheasant shoot on the Buckholt estate. I was once acting as stop-boy on one of the rides in Coal Wood when I was very nearly shot. One of the gents saw a bird run beside me, and he up with his gun and pulled the trigger, and that was that. In turn he was severely ticked off for that little episode by Lord Brassey, who punished the said gentleman by sending him home.

By getting in on these shoots I found my way around and knew all the rides in the woods and where they led

to. I remember once in the bottom of Coal Wood I was ferreting with two of my mates when I saw the old keeper coming towards us, so I went and met him. Of course he wanted to know what I was up to, so I told him a tale that I was taking a stroll and got lost, which he did not seem to believe! At any rate, I found out which way he was going, and in the meantime my mates had had time to pick up the nets and ferret. I later caught up with them and we went in behind the old boy and had quite a successful time.

In later years, having got married, I had three boys and one girl. Two of my sons took up poaching with me, but in the meantime the old keeper had died and a new one had moved in. We got to learn that he took his wife shopping every Saturday afternoon, which suited us alright. What we used to do was to go down the Buckholt Lane to the piggeries which were owned by a man called Jack Mepham. We used to boil his copper up, until the keeper went by with his wife, then away we would go, Peter, Gerald and myself and have a very profitable afternoon. Later on I bought myself a webb—or, to you, a long-net—and on a windy night, out I would go with a chap called Fred Scotcher and that we turned to good account; and as if that was not enough, I bought myself a 4/10 gun, and used to go through the woods at night and shoot the pheasants in the trees. We found these by going out at roosting time and marking the trees where they went up to roost. I palled up with a boy named Nanny Bristow; he had two dogs he had named Nell and Springo which we took out at night with a gate net to catch hares which were quite common around the fields in those days. I might add that the dog Springo was quite vicious and would not let anyone come near us, so we felt quite safe. One day we were walking around St. Mary's Lane when he caught a rabbit. Just then, who should come along but a keeper called Terry from Mr. Dixon's estate, Lunsford House.

What he was going to do to us was nobody's business, but it never came to anything. He told us to keep the dogs out of the fields and woods, as there were rabbits all over the place; to which my mate remarked that at Worsham we had to open the gates of the fields to let the rabbits out before we could put the dogs in to catch them.

As years went by I left school when I was 14 years old and went to work as an errand boy for a firm called E. G. Hunter & Sons. This was a grocers shop selling wines, spirits and beer in Station Road (now London Road). I used to get there at 8 o'clock in the morning and work until 8.30 at night, except Saturdays, which was 8 a.m. until 11 p.m. I left that after a while and went to work as a butcher boy at the London Central Meat Co., Town Hall Square. Sorry to say that was worse on a Saturday night, as I would be scrubbing down and cleaning the shop up at 12 o'clock midnight. I wonder what people would say to that in these days. I think I was getting 12/- a week for that.

Well, having got a little money, I started playing cards—a game that was called Brag, also Nap. When we got tired of that the gang would play Pitch and Toss. We would start playing Sunday morning around 9 o'clock and finish between 10 and 12 o'clock, playing by candlelight, not going home to dinner or tea unless we were broke. Happy days! All this happened in Sidley Wood or Adams's cowshed, and the lads enjoyed every minute of it.

As years went by I started to play football, having left the school team. I played on the Downs at Bexhill in 1910 for a team called St. George's Athletic; later I played for Christ Church Wanderers, and from there for Sidley United at Grovers Lane, where there was always lots of mud and water to be had. I also played cricket for the Sidley club.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

As the years went by I got a job as a porter at Sidley Station on the old South Eastern and Chatham Railway, but sorry to say it was about this time that there was the rumblings of the First World War—the 1914 War—which was soon going to happen. I, like all the other lads, had to go, but how sad it was that lots of fine boys of the village (many of whom I named earlier in the nick-names) never returned, as they died fighting for their country. What a sad and terrible loss that was to me, as most of them were mates of mine and I had grown up with them.

I was fortunate in not being released until 1915, when I had to go to Longmoor and Bordon in the Railway Operating Division, Royal Engineers. I went across to France in under three weeks on the railway in Northern France around Lens, La Basse and Armentiers right down to Calais. At the first-named places there was some of the worst fighting and bloody battles. I used to see the Ghurkas and our boys covered from head to foot in mud just coming out of the trenches; what a sorry sight it was. I was guard on two armoured trains, namely Lord French and Sir Douglas Haig which used to shell the Germans at a place called La Bourne. I was on this a short time when I was transferred to some big railway guns—namely 12in. howitzers and two naval guns that we used to take shells to at night. Once again I was transferred and by this time I was Lance Corporal and head guard on ammunition and ration trains, which was not all that much to write home about.

Again I was moved, this time I was in charge of the ambulance trains running from beside Bethune to Etaps with wounded soldiers. As I have said, it was not all honey as we used to be bombed by Gerry aeroplanes, or Gothes as we knew them. Sometimes I used to play football and cricket in the army in France.

For work which I had done in the field I was promoted to Corporal and things began to move, as I was stepping up the ladder. I was mentioned in Sir Douglas Haig's despatches for the good work I had done, as I had been in one or two upheavals where my mates had been killed beside me, a sight I never want to see again, God forbid. I soon became a Sergeant, with lots of authority—so I thought!—which made me proud to be in uniform. Well, it was about this time that the fighting was coming to an end and the Germans were retreating fast, and then the armistice and cease fire was asked for, and I thought to myself thank God, its peace at last.

In due course I went to Cologne in Germany and was soon made Quartermaster-Sergeant and served in the Inter-Allied Railway Commission, this was on the Headquarters staff, the O.C. in charge was a Major Longley; also on the staff was Major Lodge and Captain Wainwright, who I served under for quite some time until I was demobilised.



HOME AGAIN

I thought it was time I came back home to Sidley to my old job on the railway, but I was not in this long before I got stood off for not coming home sooner. Well, as I was quite well off, I thought, with my gratuity and the money that I had saved, I was out of work for nine weeks, during which I had a good time. I passed my time away by going shrimping, which brought me in about 15/- for two tides. (I was still shrimping until only a year or so ago.) Another thing I used to do was to go out early in the morning and pick mushrooms and sell them to the hotels and shops in Bexhill for which I received another 15/-. It was about this time that I used to flirt with a gamekeeper's daughter from Twisley, Potman's Lane, and that is where I got my information as to where her father and brother would be each morning, as when I knew where they were likely to be, I knew it would be safe for me to go the other way; so you see, a good time was had by all.

Well, as time went on and money was getting short I had to start work again, so I went to work on the building and the builders name was James Bodle Ltd., under the manager, W. J. Pettman, who later bought the business. I was with him for 16 years until I left, but later returned to him for another 16 years until we both retired. He was 80 years old and I was 69 years. In the time between leaving him and my return to him I went lorry driving, delivering coal for Hall & Co. This was hard work for me; sometimes I would be delivering coal—four or five tons—out at Fairlight or along the Ridge at Hastings as late as seven or eight o'clock in the winter, very often in the pouring rain, so you can guess how fed up I was with the job, being wet through and all. I left that eventually and went lorry driving for a builders' merchants; this I stuck for another 16 years, finishing up as yard foreman. Again I was on the

move, this time back on the building lark; this time it was lorry driving for Cave & Brooks Ltd., and from here back to my old firm under W. J. Pettman.

I have always been interested in sport. When I was young I used to go to the river on Crowhurst Marshes with a fishing rod and line, this sometimes went on all night and we lads would go home very tired in the morning. I still fish this stream. I also did a lot of sea fishing—sometimes out in a boat. As I have said before, I played cricket for Sidley, also football for Sidley United, St. George's F.C., and Christchurch Wanderers and I enjoyed every minute of these activities.

I took up shooting, going out with gents who owned the shooting rights of various farms. I owned my own gun, but most times they supplied the cartridges; but during the second world war I made my own. I was always interested in hunting. I remember my first hunting days with the old Bexhill Harriers or the Black and Tans under the mastership of a Mr. Ward Jackson of Cooden Mount and later under a Mr. Neven-Du-Mont of the Manor House, Old Town. Later a Mr. Pugh hunted the pack, after which it became extinct. I used to go out with the East Sussex Foxhounds, and do so up till the present day, and I enjoy my outings very much.

As I was getting on in years I took up playing bowls. I joined the Sidley B.C. and from there I went to play for Egerton Park Spartans. I still play occasionally for the Highlands B.C. I always say that this sort of activity keeps one fit. I might add here that I neither drink beer, etc., or smoke cigarettes, as I always considered it a waste of money and was not good for my health.

I can recall the old motor races which were run in front of the Sackville Hotel and up Galley Hill. After this

we had the horseshows on the sea front opposite the old Kursall (situated on the sea front at the bottom of Sea Road, and long since demolished). What lovely creatures these horses were: big teams of farm horses with their bells ringing as they went along. Also, all the tradesmen in the town used to enter their ponies and traps all dressed up—what a lovely show it always was.

I remember once—and only once—a battle of flowers being held inside the iron gates just off Sea Road. Years after these gates were pulled down—what for, I do not know. Then we had the balloons going up on the Dorset Road cricket ground; a great sight it was (how years fly by).

I forgot to mention that there used to be a Rat and Sparrow Club at the New Inn, and at night out we would go with a net which was called a clap net, and we would take this and catch sparrows and starlings around the thatched houses and around the stacks on the farms in Sidley; and then on Saturdays and Sundays we would take the ferrets and dogs and go rat-catching, for which we would get a halfpenny for every tail we got. They were exciting times, I can assure you.

As a boy I used to go to the Sidley Church Institute and train on the parallel bars and the rings; also we were taught boxing, wrestling and how to turn double somersaults, at which I was very good. We used to give exhibitions and shows at different places. I can recall the Sidley Bonfire Boys with the bonfire being lit up at the top of Preston Road. Very nearly everyone in the village used to dress up in fancy dress, and fireworks used to be thrown in all directions. Later the bonfire was lit in a field near Pankhurst's Mill. The procession used to start from Sidley Green and everything and everyone was dressed up for the occasion. The guy was made by Mr. Jack Bristow, who made a very good job of it; he has long since gone, more's

the pity, as it is sad to see first one and then the other of the old inhabitants going—it's not the same without them.

During the old days there used to be an old boy called Tommy Thwaites; he used to ride a light-brown horse. Lots of times he would be blind drunk leaning over the horse's neck and the horse taking him home; us lads used to lead the old cob up through the main road, for which we would receive a copper or two, which we got by feeling in his pocket. Another old boy called Jimmy French, who kept pigs and chicken down at Springfield Road, used to come up to the New Inn with his horse and trap. One night he got so drunk and did not know what he was up to, so we reversed his horse in the shafts of his trap. He looked so funny, as the horse was staring him in the face and he could not make it out. Another time we led his horse up the road and then went into the pub and told him his horse had bolted. He asked us to go and get it for him, so it cost the old boy another threepence, which we spent on sweets. I might add here that the horse was too old and hadn't got a good bolt in it.



As time went on I thought it was time I settled down so I found myself a sweetheart; in time we got married—an event I have never regretted. We have three boys and one delightful girl, and all are happily married. We now have five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. How nice it is to see them all.

Here is a little poem I have made up:—

*And now I am old, with greying hair,
I love to wander far and wide;
I love to walk through the woods and fields
Of my youthful days in Sidley's countryside.

When I walk the riverside, down by the Crowhurst stream,
I love to sit upon its banks, to close my eyes and dream,
And listen to the birds and bees,
And all their delightful songs.

And as the Shades of night fall fast
I wend my way back home;
I stop and thank the One above
For the days I've been allowed to roam.*

POACHERS' SLANG

Here I would like to quote the slang words used by myself and other poachers in this district:—

A gamekeeper was called a Yoggie.

A gun called a stick.

A dog was a juck.

A long-net was a web.

The things that held the net up were called prickers; the line for running the field a runner.

A ferret was called a scratcher.

The small nets to put over the holes were called flops.

The way through the woods was called a ride.

A pheasant was called a long tail.

A rabbit was called a drummer.

THE POACHER'S LAMENT

*And as the winds and moon ride high
Through the woods and fields I love to glide;
With my four-ten I'm going to boost
That lovely pheasant that's gone to roost.*

*And as I stand upon the ride
I often hear the foxes cry;
And then I hear the owls that hoot,
And all goes quiet as I shoot.*

*And now I must be on my way,
As I may fall an easy prey
To the gamekeeper
Who treads this way.*

*For he, too, is on his rounds
Like myself, listening to all the sounds;
And he notes all signs above
And on the ground.*

*As with silent footsteps I tread,
I love to think of home and bed;
But my night's work has not been done,
As I have been on the run.*

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Well, having got married and brought the boys up and thinking that we would be well off another disaster occurred which was in respect of another world war and away the three boys had to go: one in the Royal Air Force, one in the Royal Navy and one in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and I am glad to say that they all came through the war safely and were allowed to come home safe and sound, and are now doing well for themselves, not having to work as hard as I had to in my younger days.

During the Second World War I first joined the Fire Brigade, later I transferred to the Home Guard, so after being out all day I had to go on guard at night. We left the Downs Drill Hall in pairs and patrolled the sea front from Galley Hill to Cooden, calling at different points along the coast; this we did with a rifle over our shoulder, so you can see and judge for yourself how tired I was the next day when I had to go to work, and I—like many others—got very fed up at times, but in spite of all this I used to go fire watching at night when Jerry used to come over to bomb us.

It was after all this was finished and we once again got settled down that I joined the Sidley Pantomime Group. We gave some lovely shows all over the place. At that time I could sing quite a bit; I could also do tap-dancing (which I taught myself to do); also, being a bit funny, it suited me on the stage. I also acted in a straight play on the stage of the De La Warr Pavilion. This we did for about five years, during which we had a glorious time altogether, but gradually this also fizzled out, but it was nice while it lasted, and a good time was had by all.

The war having finished, things began to move in Sidley once again, new council estates with modern houses being

built, also huge blocks of flats going up all around, and modern shops and stores being built on the main road, with the roads being widened to take all the traffic; the cars that run on them seem to be getting more and more every day. I don't know what the old people would say if they could come to life and see their old village again; still I suppose it had to happen—and they call it modern progress: whether it is for the good or bad I would not know.

I sometimes like to sit and ponder over the life that I have lived. I have had some rough times—I have also had some lovely times, but I can honestly say that I have enjoyed every day of my life.

There is one thing more that I would like to mention: It was in my school days at St. Peter's at the time the master (Mr. Bunting) was away ill and Mrs. Bunting was taking the class. It so happened that Squire Brooks's men were threshing the wheat stacks opposite the school. Two or three of us went and caught some mice, put them in our pockets and let them out in the classroom. Needless to say it caused great panic in the school and when the master came back one boy named Alf Lennard was singled out for doing this job and he had to have six strokes of the cane across his bottom. I was sitting behind him at the time, so I put a pin in the toe of my shoe and when he went to sit down in his seat I stuck it in his backside. Of course he jumped up, which was only natural, as no doubt it hurt him; I had to pay for that by going out in front of the class and having six stripes of the best across my bottom, which was no laughing matter.

Little episodes keep cropping up in my mind of my life as a boy, like the one in which myself and a few other boys, one of whom was named John Harmer. We were playing in a field opposite the farm owned by Squire Johnny Brooks—later this field was to become the football field of Sidley

United, and I played on this field later on for a good many years; but going back to the instant, there was a pond in the corner of this field beside which there were two big tubs which were full of water for the cattle to drink. John thought he would like a trip out on the pond in one of them so we emptied the water out of one, pushed it on to the pond, John jumped in and away he went. Unfortunately they saw us from the farm. I looked up and saw them coming over to us, so I shouted to John, who asked me how he was to get out. I said: "The same way as you got in. Jump, you bloody fool!" Which he did, and got covered in dirty, black mud for his pains. He ran home to change his wet clothes, but he did not bargain to get a good hiding as well, but he got it and was sent to bed. At any rate he found some more clothes, put them on, found his mother's umbrella, opened it and jumped out of the bedroom window, hoping it would soften his fall, which it did; and away we went again and never went home until late in the afternoon, but the great pay-off had to come with another good hiding.

Another one of my escapades was when I was going fishing on the marsh. There used to be a pumping station beside the end arch of the Viaduct. To get the coal to this they had a coal chute from top to bottom. This day I thought would go down it, so on I get. My word, having hob-nailed boots on and it being wet as well, I simply flew down the chute and buried my head in the coal at the bottom. If had come off the sides of it, I don't think I would be here to tell this tale today.

What silly things we did when we were young. I, with some more boys, was fishing the stream beside the Viaduct one day when I found a dead water rat. I hooked it on to a line belonging to a boy called Winkles Willard when he was not looking. He got so excited at getting a bite that he

got down on his hands and knees to look for his float. I don't know what happened, but he went head first into the river. I did this self-same thing myself one Sunday morning, but the worst of it was that I had a new suit on, as I was supposed to be at Sunday School. I dare not go home as I was wet through, so I took my clothes off and laid them out to dry. After that we trudged back home, where one of my mates got a clothes brush and we set to work getting the mud off. As it was, I got a good tanning when I went indoors, but a good time was had by all.

Another time on one of our fishing excursions it started to rain on our way home, so we asked the farmer at New Lodge Farm whether we could shelter out of the rain in his barn. This we did, but we came unstuck as we started to leap from one rafter to another, when one of the lads—Harry Lambert—missed his footing and down he came. I remember we had to very nearly carry him home, so that put paid to that.

But speaking of how accidents happen, and how silly one can get, it was washing day, my mother asked me to go over to Sidley Wood and get some old lighting wood for the copper fire, so off I went with an old sack over my arm to get this wood. I climbed up an old pine tree, stood on a branch and tried to break it off, which I did—down I came, branch and all! I must have laid on the ground for quite half-an-hour before I came too. This pine tree, by the way, is still there, and when I pass it, as I often do, I think back to the years gone by, and what enjoyment it gave me in my young life.

I was fishing in the pond at Buckholt Farm with a boy named Spud Taylor, when he sat on a wasps' nest. Of course he did not relish it, and neither would I. The wasps took a dim view of it, too! At any rate I had a jolly good

laugh over it, as I could see the funny side of it—him hopping round like a peg-top holding his bottom.

After my marriage to Edith Masters our family of three boys and a girl were growing up and we are very proud to say that we never had any trouble from them. They would—and still do—help one another; but oh dear, what a struggle it was to feed and clothe them in the early days! But we managed it, what with the missus making knickers, etc., I used to go out in the shed I had and mend their shoes, as every week one or the other wanted a repair. This shed, I may say, came in handy later on, as the boys used to play in it, so we did not have to worry where they were. Later on they kept pigeons in the shed, but these became a nuisance so they got rid of them, and then it had to be rabbits—and we soon got rid of them. In time, as I have already mentioned the boys came home from wartime service with the forces and got married, and my daughter married a boy called Robin Thatcher. So you see, it has left me and my old dutch all on our own, but very happy we are together; besides, we are always having one or the other of them popping in and seeing how we are getting on, and I do say here and now that it is always good to see them.

My wife and I had the foresight to own our own house, so we put the money down on the house in which we now live and I'm glad to say that it has paid dividends, as we have both got security, as it is our own and nobody can turn us out of it, for when one looks around and sees the high rents that people have to pay, it makes use thankful that we did buy No. 4 Claremont Road.

Another thing of the past I would like to mention was when I was a choirboy at the Sidley tin church, how we used to have choir suppers up at the Rectory, Old Town, Bexhill; also how we used to ride in the old farm waggons

for our Sunday School treat up to the field behind St. Peter's Church. This field was also used for Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebrations and we were given mugs with her head on to mark the occasion—how time flies!

As I have said, I have kept myself very fit and did not smoke, but when I was young I disgraced myself once by getting drunk. I, with some more chaps, had been to the horse racing which was being held at Polegate. We went on our cycles, but coming back home we called at too many pubs. I can just remember coming out of the Lamb Inn, Sewers Bridge, and jumping on my bike. Off I came and fell straight under some horses in a four-in-hand coach belonging to Skinners of Hastings. My bike got smashed up and to this day I don't know what became of it. I was lucky I came out of it alright. At any rate they put me on the coach and dropped me off at the Denbigh Hotel where they gave me some angostura to drink to sober me up. I eventually arrived at Sidley where a girl named Aunty Harris who knew me took hold of my arm and took me to my home in North Road. This, I may say, taught me a lesson and I have never touched strong drink since.

How times have changed in this village of ours. Instead of the gas lamps in the streets we have got electricity, just to be in the fashion I suppose, and talking of gas lamps, the old lamp-lighter used to come round with a light on a pole or stick and push it up inside to light the lamp. Sometimes if it was windy—as it very often was—the light on the pole would go out and then the old man would come into our house in Sidley Street and light up again; his name, by the way, was Mr. Deer, and I can remember that he only had one arm and wore a steel hook on the other.

Well, as time went on lots of the old landmarks were being pulled down: the Sidley to Crowhurst railway line had to go (more's the pity), also the Blacksmith's forge,

where I spent a lot of my time, also had to go, and up went a biscuit factory on one site and a row of shops on the other, and on the opposite side of the road, away went the old cottages to make way for some more shops and the supermarkets, and this is what they call—in this day and age—modern progress, but is it? Things are no cheaper. Once upon a time one could get a dozen boxes of matches for twopence, a loaf of bread for threepence, and a small one for three-halfpence. I can remember the time when a man came round early every morning with hot rolls, which were jolly nice with butter or dripping on. On Sundays this same man came round with muffins which we had for tea. Another character who came round on Sundays, was a chap called Tassy Tutt. He sold peanuts—his war-cry was: “Come on all you monkeys, only a few left!”

I often sit and wonder what my father and mother—in fact, all the old people long since gone—would say if they came to life again to see all these drastic changes that have been made. For instance, the large blocks of flats that have gone up in Preston Road, where once stood glorious and beautiful fields, where in my young days I played all my games and flew big kites which I always made myself with paste and newspapers. These sort of things always gave me great pleasure, and I would see how high I could fly them, with yards and yards of string to roll on a frame, which I also had the patience to make.

MY HUNTING DOGS

I must here mention the dogs that I have had, which I trained to catch rabbits and to be with ferrets and guns. By watching them I could tell what there was about, especially in the evening when I went duck shooting down on the marsh; or even in a wood you could tell whether there was

anyone else about and you could tell which way they were coming by listening to the bird such as the magpie, the jay, the blackbird, and the galley bird, or woodpecker. All these would give one away if one were not cute enough to study their habits. But, back to dogs: The first one I owned was named Nipper; he was a Lurcher-cross. I have seen him run and catch many a rabbit and hare on the run. He was one of the fastest dogs in Sidley; I had him for close on sixteen years; his colour was a brownish mixture. I could make him do as I wanted, but I did not have to scold him or he would not work.

The next on the list was a little black dog called Binkie; he had at long tail which would stick out straight when he was pointing to anything. This was always handy to me for I used to carry a four-ten walking stick gun when walking around the lanes and woods.

The next dog I owned was a little dog I called Mickey; this one was a cross between a pom and a fox terrier. He was a terror for fighting, if you let him, but he would always do as he was told and not take any notice of other dogs unless they pitched into him. If they did, then look out! But he was as good as gold and got me lots of dinners. I used to take him out with shooting parties, as at that time I was in great demand, for he never missed anything on the ground we were working over and he was such a good retriever of birds which had fallen a long way away. He was also good for duck shooting—I have seen him swim for half-an-hour trying to find a duck that I had shot down. I was very sorry when he died, as he was so very handy to have in the woods at night when it was very dark and misty and one was apt to lose a pheasant after having knocked it out of the tree in which it was roosting. All very exciting, but one had to be very alert when walking about in the woods at night.

Well, the last dog I owned was a pedigree fox terrier, but he was only a pet. His name was Toby, but he was not so intelligent as the other three that I had owned. So that is the history of my dogs; but here I would mention that one cannot train a dog—or any animal—by cruelty, but only by kindness.

MORE RECENTLY

This is Saturday, December 2nd, 1967, and we have just had our three boys in to see us. Needless to say there was plenty of leg-pulling at my expense. This came from Ken, Peter, and Robin (our son-in-law); but who cares—it is very nice to see them, and to know that they all get on well together and do not fall out with one another.

I am getting ready to go and do a spot of sea fishing. I am sorry to say that the shrimps have all vanished, so it means packing the old shrimp net away for another season, but I hope it won't be long before I have to get it out again. As the weeks roll by, the cold weather sets in—as a matter of fact snow came down on us this Friday (the 8th December), and we had about 6ins. to 8ins. of it. It seemed to catch everyone by surprise and there was panic all round; I don't know why, because in the old days when I was young the snow came and it seemed to freeze harder and lasted longer than it does these days—so hard in fact that I used to be able to slide from Sidley to St. Peter's School, Chantry Lane, as at that time most boys wore hob-nailed boots and they were just the job for getting along on the ice and kept us warm. Another thing that kept us warm in those days and kept us in trim was the iron hoops. How we used to run with them and keep them going with a nail in a stick and lovely times we had with them. These hoops, I may add, were made by Josh Turner the local blacksmith,

and cost us 6d.—they were well worth it. The girls used to get their wooden hoops made by an old boy named Mr. Chittenden, who also made the old Sussex Trugs. But alas, most of the old trades have now died out in these parts. Another trade which has also died out is the wheelwrights which was owned by a Mr. Edmunds, later by Mr. Beal (the name can still be seen to this day on the old cottage walls behind Smith & Humphreys garage). This garage, by the way, was built on a garden plot surrounded by a high wooden fence opposite which is the old iron triangle and with it the lovely high trees inside of it, which all added up to the old rural and lovely village of Sidley, which has now been spoilt by all the modern buildings built in recent years. But as I said before, it had to come.

Well, we are now in January, 1968, and have had some snow, but this has not prevented me from going out, as I have been for my favourite walk which has taken me down Buckholt Lane and out on to the Crowhurst Marsh. Here I might mention I have just heard the bark of a fox, as it is getting dusk. Even so, he is getting about early, but I suppose he is hungry and his belly is calling; but I think it must be hard work for him to get a living as they have done away with his favourite food, the rabbit. What a terrible disease this myxomatosis is! I have seen these poor creatures running about blind and not knowing what to do. So whoever put this disease around ought to be put away for a time for the suffering they have caused.

Another welcome sound I have just heard is a couple of cock pheasants going up to roost; so where they are there must be some hen birds as well. I pin-pointed these to be in the middle of Coombe Wood. I only hope that they survive the trigger-happy youngsters who are running around with guns these days, as I should like to see more of these brilliant coloured birds—in fact, all species of birds and animal life—increase, as it would give great pleasure to

go round the fields and woods, especially in the summer months, and this I am sure would give a great deal of happiness to many other people as well.

Saturday, February 3rd, 1968. Have just come home from a morning's fox hunting. Had a very good time on the Normanhurst Estate; found one or two foxes, but they were too artful and would not break cover, so they live for another day, but it was good to get out into the country again after being confined to the house through the cold weather. I arrived back home somewhere in the region of two o'clock, in time to have my lunch and get ready to go and see my old football team (Sidley United) play a match against Horsham Y.M.C.A., but it was not very exciting, and they lost 2-0 to a better team.

Back home again it is now five o'clock and time to have tea, change and get ready to go out at 6.30, this time to go to the whist drive held at the Athletic Club, which finishes at about 9.30, and then it's home again at 10 o'clock to watch the Match of the Day on the television. So you can guess by this this I have had a pretty full day. So it is now to bed.

Sunday, February 4th. Got out of bed at 9.30 a.m. It is a lovely morning, but very cold so stopped indoors beside the fire—I find that this is not a bad pastime for such cold weather. But as the day goes on and night begins to fall it is blowing a gale and there is a touch of rain in the air, so wanting a bit of fresh air in my lungs I took a stroll round the country and visited one or two woods, but sorry to say I drew a blank, but that was as I expected it to be, as the longtails get right back into the ivy when they go up to roost in cold weather and it is always a job to find them. So it was another wasted journey for me, but it was good to be out in the night air and listen to the nightlife of the countryside, and it was lovely while it lasted.

Well, the month of February has come to an end, but nothing of note has happened except that it has been very cold, with north east winds blowing, so I have been keeping the fire going. Now that we are in March I look forward to the time when can go round the country and pick the flowers that grow, especially the primroses. Then, the time is coming round when I shall be able to go trout fishing; also it is gradually coming round to the time when I shall be playing bowls. But at the moment there is a gale force wind blowing with flurries of snow, so I suppose we shall have to put up with this for a little longer. But it will be a pleasure to roam round the countryside again when everything is on the move and the birds are singing their gay songs.

Today is **18th March, 1968**, and I now record that I have just found my first bird's nest, which is a thrush's; there are four eggs in it so I shall have to watch it carefully, as last year there was a grey squirrel prowling round raiding quite a few nests, so if needs be I shall have to exterminate this little nuisance.

We are now at the end of March and into April, the weather is still very cold with some snow showers. I hope it gets warmer in a very short time, if only for the birds' sakes. I expect to be hearing the glorious sound of the cuckoo soon, as he is due in this country this month. When he does make his appearance you can bet on it that things are changing for the better, and the dawn chorus of the birds is with us again, What a lovely sound that is.

Now it is **April 18th** and today I have heard my first cuckoo, and I must confess it sounds like music to me. Another event took place last night (Wednesday), Sidley United were playing Bexhill Town at football when a terrific thunder-storm came on and everyone got soaked to the skin. It was so bad that the referee had to stop the match, and it will have to be played on another evening.

This is **Sunday, 28th April**. I heard that there were quite a lot of shrimps about, so up I got and was in the sea at 6 o'clock this morning. I managed to get a gallon of them so it was worth the trouble of getting up so early, as it makes such a change to have them for tea.

Well we are now in the month of May and the primroses have all but finished blooming, but along comes another flower in all its splendour and this, I might mention, is the bluebell. What a gorgeous sight it is when walking through a wood to see one mass of bluebells poking their heads above the green just like a lovely carpet swaying in the breeze. The countryside is a lovely sight at this time of the year and if the people would take more notice of it than they do now I am sure it would make their lives much happier, if only to sit and listen to the glorious song of the birds.

Today is the **8th of May** and I have been fishing with a pal named Ted Morris. We went to a farm at Chiddingly belonging to a Mr. Austin, but all we got for our trouble was a wet shirt, as it rained hard all day and we never caught a fish. Anyway, that is just how it goes, and there is another day tomorrow. I understand that the wild mink are causing a lot of trouble along the rivers, and are on the increase. These, I might add, are killing a lot of the fish off.

This week I should be playing bowls, but as it is very wet it looks as if we shall have to play in wellington boots instead of bowls shoes.

It is now June and everything in the country is at its very best—flowers blooming, birds still singing—how nice it is to walk out and enjoy it all. I took a stroll once again down to the Crowhurst marshes. What a lot of work is being done by the River Board, cutting new streams and clearing the old ones.

Having passed through the month of June we are now well into the month of July, and today is a big occasion for

me as it is the 14th day and that means it is my 76th birthday and I have had all my children round to see me. How lovely it was, and what can one wish for better than that, and that they still think of this as their home. It is a lovely thought for my wife and me.

August 4th, and after helping to paint the front of the house, I thought I would take a morning off and go sea fishing. So away I went at 7 o'clock with my pal and we managed to catch 20 mackerel and one plaice. So we had a good time.

We are now in October and on Tuesday 22nd the foxhounds met at Buckholt. Needless to say I was on home ground and had a jolly good hunt, with plenty of foxes—almost as many as there were hounds. So I spent a good morning running round the country.

I have just exchanged my Honda motor-bike for a new Yamaha, which is lovely to ride. But I still do a lot of walking, what with rabbit catching, foxhunting, and so on. Being now December and just before Christmas I thought I must go and have a night out, so I went through the woods to see what I could find and my luck held good, as I got a couple of cock pheasants, which made my evening. The wife and I lived like lords of the manor while they lasted. I went out at 2 o'clock and arrived back home at 6.30. It was a good job I knew my way through the woods, as it was very dark and my wife was rather worried in case I was lost.

A few more of the nick-names of lads of my boyhood have just come to mind, I may have forgotten them earlier: Chuck Wood, Damson Adams, Jonison Harmer, Chinny Dallaway, China Taylor, Rooster Ransom, Fatty Ransom, Sharper Payne, China Collins, Cherry and Strangle Cook, Martha Morris, Jerkum Morris, Sherb Ransom, Bosher Beale, Stuke Stanley, Spud Taylor, Bogey Isted, Botney Freeman, Toffee Marchant, Bunny Adams. Sad to say, very nearly

all these lads were killed in the First World War. I often wonder, as I sit at home, what they would think of Sidley now, if they could come back to life.

Last Sunday I went down to the spring by Red Grove Wood and got three bunches of water-cress. Fancy, water-cress has grown there ever since I can remember. I used to get it from there when I was a boy going to school. But in those days we were chased off by old Wood, or old man Noakes or Ridon Errey. What fun it was; we knew that they could not run and catch us. But that was a long time ago now, and it doesn't bear thinking about. Happy days!

I remember there used to be a little hut that stood at the entrance to the brickyard, where a cripple boot and shoe repairer named Bill Christmas used to do his repairing. I spent many a happy time with him while he was working. Now that, with all the farms, has gone. I am getting on to my 87th year and I must say that I find it much harder to get about, but I must not grumble, as when I look around and see lots of old folk who cannot get about at all, I have lots to be thankful for, and must keep plodding on.

We are now in the year 1980 and it makes me wonder whether I have lived through the best times, as now the Russians have invaded Afghanistan and started another war. . . . Now it is 1982, and the war with Argentina over the Falkland Isles has been brought to an end. Let us hope that there will be no more.

I am now coming up to my 90th birthday, and I would like to thank my children and their wives for looking after my wife and myself so well. No one could ask for more. I am very thankful to Ken and Sally, Peter and Nora, Gerald and Freda, and Beryl and Robin for all they have done.

I close for now with the hope that whoever reads this book will have a little insight of how this village of Sidley was when I was young and how it is today.

GEORGE FREEMAN.

OUR FAMILY OF FREEMANS (As at 30th June, 1982)

Here is a list of the names of our children and their families, starting with the eldest:—

KEN AND SALLY (Son and Daughter-in-Law).
PETER AND NORA (Son and Daughter-in-Law);
RAYMOND AND DI (Grandson and Wife).
HAZEL AND BOB (Grand-daughter and Husband);
SARAH, BRIAN, STEPHEN (Great-Grandchildren).
GERALD AND FREDA (Son and Daughter-in-Law);
MICHAEL AND PAUL (Grandchildren).
BERYL AND ROBIN THATCHER (Daughter and Son-in-Law);
MARK THATCHER (Grandson).

Well, that is my father's story, and I am pleased to have been able to play a part in producing the booklet that tells it. The final pages of his exercise book covered several years and continue in a similar vein, telling of his love of the countryside and all the wild birds and animals in it, their habits he has noted from time to time on his walks. Also he describes many of his other activities during this period, such as sea fishing, shrimping, fox hunting, rabbit catching; playing bowls; his bingo, whist drive and football match attendances, etc—a regular diary of the events in his life in the years covered. The many details he recounts are very interesting, but as they are more of a personal diary and not so much about the Sidley of his childhood and youth, for the sake of brevity I have omitted them.

I must mention here one event during this period (which he also mentions in the copy I have omitted) and that is the short period he spent in the Bexhill Hospital when he had gallstones removed—a very serious operation for a man of his age (at the time he was 88). But he came through it with flying colours thanks to his constitution and the skill and dedication of the surgeons, nursing staff and others of the hospital, for which no praise can be too high. He here acknowledges the great debt he owes them, and these thanks are also echoed by the rest of our family.

He is now coming up to his 90th birthday, and I am hoping to get this booklet printed and presented to him in time for this event. Other copies will be given to the rest of the family in the hope that they will be handed down to their children in the future, so that they may know something of the roots from which they have grown, and of the esteem and love which we feel for our father and their ancestor.

Ken Freeman.



